Kent Association for the Blind

Age-related Macular Degeneration

What is age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)?

AMD is the most common cause of sight loss in the UK and usually affects people over 50. However, macular conditions do occur in children and adults of all ages and are often known as macular dystrophies.

The back of the eye is lined with a thin layer of light sensitive cells called the retina. The retina sends signals to the brain so we can see, and the macula is a small part of the retina that allows us to see colour and fine details.

Dry AMD

Dry AMD is a deterioration of the cells of the macula which die off and do not regenerate. This can happen over many years. The term dry does not mean dry eyes (that is a different condition), just that the condition is not wet AMD.

Dry AMD can turn to Wet, so please seek advice from an optician or hospital eye clinic if you notice changes in your vision.

Wet AMD

Wet AMD develops when abnormal blood vessels grow into the macula. These leak blood or fluid which leads to scarring of the macula and potentially rapid loss of central vision. Wet AMD can develop very suddenly, but it can be treated if caught quickly. Fast referral to a hospital specialist is essential.

How AMD affects sight

AMD causes a gradual deterioration of your central vision while your side, or peripheral, vision generally remains normal. Initially, your central vision may be blurred and details like print on a page or features on a face may become difficult to make out. Eventually, you may have a central blank area. KAB can teach you how to use your remaining sight to continue with everyday life.

Spotting the signs

Some people with macular conditions may not notice any immediate changes in their vision, but others may experience:

- Straight objects, like door frames or lampposts, looking distorted or bent.
- Blurred vision or gaps in their vision.
- Objects in front of them changing shape, size, colour, or seeming to move or disappear.
- Dark spots, like a smudge on glasses, appearing in the centre of their vision.
- Colours looking faded
- Words disappearing when reading.
- Difficulty adapting from dark to light environments.

If you notice any changes in your vision, or are concerned about your sight please seek advice from an optician or hospital eye clinic immediately.

Reducing the risk of AMD

Changes to your lifestyle can help reduce the risk of developing AMD as you get older including:

- Avoiding smoking.
- Drinking less alcohol.
- Maintaining good blood pressure.
- Avoiding over exposure to sunlight.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Eating a diet low in saturated fats but with lots of leafy green vegetables and oily fish.

Living with AMD

There are also lots of ways to stay active and independent if you have AMD, such as:

- Using strong contrasting colours and large print text.
- Getting closer to objects you want to see, like the TV.
- Using good lighting like a task lamp for close up work.
- Using your remaining vision by looking to one side of what it is you want to see. This is called Eccentric Viewing and KAB staff can help you learn this technique.

The Macular Society is a national charity that supports people with macular conditions by offering advice and guidance on a range of topics, as well as hosting support groups in many areas of the country. You can contact the Macular Society on 0300 3030 111 or visit their website: www.macularsociety.org

Treatment

There are some treatments available for certain types of AMD and you will need to discuss possible treatment options with your Consultant Ophthalmologist. The treatments are designed to prevent or slow further deterioration. There is however no cure for AMD.

Help to manage sight loss

KAB's specialist teams provide a range of services to help people of all ages with a sight impairment to be independent, safe and mobile. Our support includes mobility training so you can get around safely and help to learn new techniques so you can carry out everyday tasks like making a drink or cooking dinner.

We can also give you advice about specialist equipment that can help you make the best use of your remaining vision.

For information about good eye health, visit our help and advice pages on our website: www.kab.org.uk

Stay connected

Find out more about what we do and how we can support you by signing up to receive our KAB Connect newsletter. Filled with useful information, advice and gadget reviews, the newsletter is produced twice a year; in the Spring and Autumn.

To receive KAB Connect, email us at enquiries@kab.org.uk or call us on 01622 691357. It is available in many different formats, including large print, audio, email and Braille.

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